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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 001345

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SUBJECT: TENSION FLARES OVER PAKISTAN FENCING ALONG
AFGHAN-PAKISTAN BORDER

Classified By: Ambassador William Wood for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Pakistani actions to fence areas near the eastern border are seen by the Afghans as a deliberate effort to provoke a crisis over acceptance of the Durand Line. Shots have been fired, and President Karzai is said to have instructed Minister of Defense Wardak not to allow any encroachment on Afghan soil. National Security Adviser Rassoul convened an urgent meeting on April 19. COMISAF Gen. McNeill, CSTC-A CG MG Durbin and DCM persuaded the GOA to reach out to Pakistani counterparts to try to defuse tensions and use the upcoming April 30 meeting between Presidents Musharraf and Karzai in Ankara as an opportunity to outline a way forward on sensitive border matters. Ambassador briefed Secretary Rice by previously scheduled SVTC. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Concern on the part of the Afghan authorities over border demarcation and control issues has been rising, particularly since President Musharraf's decision to install fencing along some stretches near the border, a move the Pakistani side insists is meant to impede major infiltration routes. While the importance of the issue is recognized by all sides, the political sensitivity in Afghanistan of doing anything that appears to legitimize the Durand Line has hindered political-level discussion of the matter. The Afghans last year dropped the idea of handling this issue in the Tripartite mil-mil talks, and at today's meeting again took the somewhat untenable position that fencing implies border demarcation and therefore is "out of bounds" for discussion.

¶3. (C) At the operational level, however, management of the specific issue of the placement of the Pakistani fencing appeared on track until this week. Without touching on the larger issue of the legitimacy of the Durand Line or even the exact location of the

border, agreement was reached at the March 17 Border Security Subcommittee Meeting (BSSM) in Bagram on a way ahead. The PakMil's Director of Military Operations, Brigadier General (BG) Nasser Khan Janjua, and the Commander of the ANA's 203rd Corps, Major General (MG) Khaliq, concurred with plans to stage a series of border flag meetings and terrain walks in the areas slated for fencing to ensure that, whatever the exact location of the border, the fence itself would be erected indisputably inside Pakistani territory.

¶4. (C) Over the next weeks a series of three such border flag meetings and terrain walks was conducted. BG Shafqat Nawaz Khan, commander of Pakistan's 116th Brigade, and BG Said Maluq, commander of the ANA's 2nd Brigade, 203rd Corps, both participated in at least one of these meetings. And all went off without incident. On April 14 an additional border flag meeting and terrain walk were scheduled for April 17 in the Shkin-Angor Adda area, a location where both we and the ANA had been signaling concerns about the location of the planned fencing. In advance of the meeting on the 17th, ANA Chief of Operations Lieutenant General Karimi informed Khaliq that neither he nor Brigade Commander Maluq were to participate, reportedly on the instructions of President Karzai. As a result, the local U.S. commander conducted the terrain walk on his own, conferring with PakMil at the location of the various survey flags. In the meantime, the local Kandak commander instructed his soldiers to tear down the survey flags. This led to two flags being removed and the Pakistani military

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firing warning shots. U.S. embedded trainers intervened to get the ANA to return to their base.

¶5. (C) On April 18 there were no incidents. That day MG Khaliq passed word to CJTF-82 that Minister of Defense Wardak and ANA Chief of Staff General Bismillah Khan were working the issue with President Karzai and requested U.S. assistance in requesting that the Pakistani side refrain from any provocative actions.

¶6. (C) On the morning of April 19, 12 ANA soldiers again attempted to remove survey flags. This led to a brief confrontation, with ANA firing at a Pakistani operating position and the Pakistani side reportedly returning warning shots. No injuries appear to have resulted. In the afternoon, NSA Rassoul and Defense Minister Wardak met with Gen. McNeill, MG Durbin and DCM, and indicated that President Karzai had issued explicit instructions that the Afghan unit on the border at Paktika "defend" Afghan territory and prevent Pakistani forces from placing flags that would mark areas designated for fencing (and hence, the logic goes, the border). Wardak dramatically declared that Afghan soldiers, blood would be shed before "one inch of Afghan soil" would be ceded.

¶7. (C) Gen. McNeill, MG Durbin and DCM urged restraint. We asked whether the GOA had attempted to reach out to senior level Pakistani counterparts to defuse the situation - they had not. We urged them to do so, and NSA Rassoul said he would attempt to call Tariq Aziz, while the MOD and CHOD would attempt to reach out to counterparts as well. The GOA has also scheduled a meeting with the Pakistani Ambassador in Kabul. We pointed out that Ambassador Wood was about to meet with Secretary Rice by SVTC and would raise Afghan concerns there, and also that President Karzai had an opportunity to raise the matter in a phone call with President Bush scheduled for today as well. (Note: In contrast to NSA Rassoul's and MOD Wardak's sense of

urgency over this matter, we understand President Karzai did not raise the incident in his telcon with President Bush on April 19 - at about the same time Rassoul convened his crisis meeting. End note.)

¶8. (C) The Afghans agreed that the upcoming meeting between Presidents Musharraf and Karzai to be hosted by Turkey on April 30 would provide a good opportunity for the Presidents to reduce tension over border issues and explore confidence building measures to prevent recurrence.

¶9. (C) Late in the evening on April 19, the Ministry of Defense issued a press release in which they described the security situation as normal and said they were trying to solve the issue diplomatically. Ambassador and COMISAF plan to meet with President Karzai within the next few days, but the situation appears to be tamped down for the moment.

¶10. (C) Comment: It strikes us that, difficult as it may be to persuade the Afghans of this, the time has come to generate a suitable format or forum for the two sides to tackle the border issue in some way, even if just to buy time. It also strikes us as unfortunate that, while a workable process appeared to be functioning well to minimize the change of actual Pakistani encroachment on territory seen by the Afghan side as theirs, late in the game the issue became politicized. While we continue to question the utility of the Pakistani fencing, we note that at the operational mil-to-mil level, we believe the Pakistani

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side as acted in good faith and with restraint. We need to gently urgen the Afghan leadership to follow suit. End Comment.

WOOD